

Q and A

# Tony Lukas: Nixon, CIA And Hughes

J. Anthony Lukas, a Pulitzer prize winning journalist, is the author of "Nightmare, the Underside of the Nixon Years." He was interviewed by Washington Star Staff Writer Norman Kempster.

**Question:** In the 18 months since Richard Nixon resigned we've learned a number of disquieting facts about previous presidents. Did Nixon do anything his predecessors didn't do?

**Lukas:** The first thing that needs to be said about that is that we do not know everything that Richard Nixon did, and we certainly do not know everything that his predecessors did. There has undoubtedly been more detail on the underside of the Nixon years than there has on the underside of the Kennedy or the Johnson years. I would say on the basis of the materials that are available at the moment, the difference is that the two earlier presidents seemed to be able to use the existing agencies, particularly the CIA and the FBI, more successfully than Nixon — Nixon meeting some resistance in both agencies.

**Q:** In what way?

**A:** From the CIA because he was not the CIA's kind of man. He did not mix with Richard Helms the way that John Kennedy could, they did not share the social background. And with J. Edgar Hoover because Hoover was getting to be an old, cranky, cantankerous man who was still very image-conscious. For all those reasons, Nixon couldn't use those two existing agencies. And Nixon had to set up his own in-house operations — first the Caulfield and Ulazawitz operation which was clownish and therefore perhaps not all that dangerous, and finally the somewhat more professional but also rather clownish plumbers operation which was dangerous.

**Q:** Are you saying then that the Nixon scandals may have resulted somewhat from the fact that he felt to be an outsider from the Eastern establishment which his predecessors had been able to use?

**A:** Absolutely. I am convinced of this. I firmly believe that one of the major roots of Watergate is Richard Nixon's profound feeling of powerlessness. If I may interject a personal note here — for years I believed that I wanted to be nothing more than a New York Times foreign correspondent. And I believed that when I became a New York Times foreign correspondent that my life would change, that my acne would disappear, that I would be better with women, that I would be suave and cool and debonair. And I became a New York Times foreign correspondent at the age of 29, and I found that my life did not change. I still have traces of acne, I was no better with women, I was no suaver, cooler or more debonair. I was still the same Tony Lukas. I think a comparable thing happened to Richard Nixon. He craved being president of the United States, he got into office and he found that that same feeling of powerlessness which had dogged him for decades was still there. He felt powerless in the Oval Office and became determined to destroy those enemies who he believed were still out there.

**Q:** Surely Nixon must have known what the tapes contained. Do you think he believed that the tapes could be covered up forever?

**A:** I have a theory which I put forward in this book about why the President made the tapes, which suggests that he made them, in very large part, because he wanted to get a massive tax deduction for the gift of the tape-recorded history of his presidency to the National Archives. That would explain why he didn't do what I think in retrospect he should have done, which was to destroy all of the tapes in the 10 days between Butterfield's announcement and the time they were subpoenaed by Cox. There are other reasons that he didn't destroy the tapes. I think he was persuaded by some of his lawyers that the courts

couldn't get them. The lawyers were obviously dead wrong. They seemed to feel that the President wanted to hear that they couldn't get them. He also believed that portions of the tapes were exculpatory, as some of them were.

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